



Playing House: Notes of a Reluctant Mother

Lauren Slater

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Lauren Slater's obsessive--compulsive disorder manifests in various ways in this collection of essays—she counts by increments of three to keep the moon in orbit and planes from falling. But, surprisingly, there is no dilemma over whether she should pass on those traits to offspring. “After all,” she writes, “the same genetic structure that drives me to check and tap also spurs me to put words on a white page, to garden until the yard is a riot of reds, yellows and delphinium blues each summer. My genes, like everyone else’s I think, are both flower and thorn.”

With the birth of Slater's first child, we find her in the “contemporary female dilemma of juggling two balls, motherhood plus career. But there is a third ball here, and it has been overlooked: Mental illness.” But what she experiences when she decides to go back to work full-time and let her husband take care of the baby is perfectly normal for a parent—guilt at not spending more time with her child.

It all adds up to a title that is somewhat of a misnomer. Slater is not “playing house.” She is going through a normal life. But when you have obsessive tendencies and depression, even normalcy seems to you, and only you, to be life on the “fringe.”

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